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Capability Set 13

NIE expertise prepares units

By Claire Heininger

WO1 Mark Miller has his hands full serving as the net tech for one of the first Brigade Combat Teams to be fielded with Capability Set 13.

Fortunately, he also had a preview.

WO1Miller, net tech for the 3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, spent a month at Fort Bliss, Texas during preparations for the Network Integration Evaluation 13.1, shadowing his counterparts in the 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division in order to learn various network technologies and management tools. When new equipment fielding and training began in October 2012 at Fort Drum, N.Y., he was better prepared for the challenge.

"Just the fact of getting my hands on the equipment was invaluable," WO1Miller said. "The exposure to it was great."

WO1 Miller's experience is part of a larger effort to link 2/1 AD with 3/10 MTN and other units receiving Capability Set 13. By sharing both the technical expertise and operational lessons-learned that 2/1 AD has gleaned through four NIEs, the Army aims to better prepare other units to operate with the new network.

"We all want to make sure we deliver a quality product to the Army," said LTC Andy Morgado, G3 for the Brigade Modernization Command, which is charged with compiling Soldier feedback out of the NIE and making recommendations to Army leadership. "There's no better way of confirming that from the Soldier's perspective than getting with the guys who are actually going to field it in harm's way, and making sure they are comfortable with what they're getting."

(U.S. Army photo by Claire Heininger)

Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division work inside the Tactical Command Post during the Army's Network Integration Evaluation 13.1 in October 2012. The Army is sharing the technical expertise, operational lessons-learned and training best practices 2/1 AD has gained through the NIEs with the units receiving Capability Set 13.

That exchange is taking place in multiple ways, including weekly conference calls between NIE subject matter experts and the receiving brigades, video interviews with 2/1 AD leadership on how to leverage the network for various operations, and inviting signal officers to gain hands-on experience setting up and operating CS 13 during the run-up to NIE.

"It gave them the opportunity to not only help us get the network up and running, but also understand some of the intricacies," said MAJ Ernest Tornabell, S6 for 2/1 AD. "That way they can set themselves up for success – so when the systems do come there, they can already have a plan of action and be able to execute that plan of action to address the fielding and training of their Soldiers. With the amount of information they gain here, they will at least be able to be that much further along than if they were just given the equipment and told, 'Hey, here you go.'"

CS 13 units also formally receive information on each system's strengths and limitations, as well as Soldier-developed tactics, techniques and procedures for operating the equipment. Training best practices for CS 13 systems – individually and as an integrated set – were also developed through the NIE. The training is designed not just to make Soldiers proficient on the systems within their individual specialties, but also to understand how those systems fit in with the rest of the brigade network structure.

That is a change from the last decade of war, when the Army provided network capabilities in response to urgent needs, but did not always have the infrastructure and processes in place to support them, leaving Soldiers to figure out how they worked and how they integrated with the rest of their equipment. The NIE is designed to perform the integration and establish proper training up front. Many of the training personnel involved in the NIEs, who are now familiar with how to build training for a collective package of systems, are now training units on CS 13.

For 2/1 AD Soldiers, the direct connection to CS 13 units adds a sense of urgency to their mission at NIE. SGT Lance Bradford, 2/1 AD, said he has de-

(U.S. Army photo by Claire Heninger)

Soldiers from 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division drive a vehicle equipped with Warfighter Information Network-Tactical (WIN-T) Increment 2 during the Army's Network Integration Evaluation (NIE) 13.1 in November 2012. WIN-T Increment 2 is a major upgrade to the tactical network backbone that enables mobile mission command.

ployed three times and sees the value of the NIE in evaluating network gear on behalf of other Soldiers.

"We understand their needs," SGT Bradford said. "It definitely does give you a sense of worth to put stuff out downrange."

Others have an even closer connection. As they rotate out of 2/1 AD, some Signal Soldiers are being assigned to CS 13 units, while others are dispatched to those units on a short term basis to assist them in training and building their network infrastructure.

"They have a lot of experience with it, they need to go to units that are fielding the system," LTC Morgado said. "They've learned an awful lot by being here."

Claire Heininger is a staff writer for Symbolic Systems, Inc. supporting the U.S. Army Program Executive Office Command, Control and Communications-Tactical. She is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and a former Statehouse reporter for The Star-Ledger, New Jersey's largest newspaper.

ACRONYM QuickScan

10th Mountain - 10th Mountain Division
2/1 AD – 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division

BCT - Brigade Combat Team
BMC - Brigade Modernization Command
CS – Capability Set

NIE - Network Integration Evaluation
TTPs - Tactics, Techniques and Procedures